

67 Brunswick Street,  
Fitzroy, Vic., 3065

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4th April, 1974.

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### HOUSING COMMISSION ENQUIRY

Towards the end of last year the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Housing Commission Tenants Union and the Victorian Council of Social Service called for an enquiry into the Housing Commission of Victoria.

As a result, there has been a series of meetings involving many interested individuals and organisations who have formulated some guidelines for such an enquiry. A steering committee has been formed and it is now organising for a meeting to launch a public campaign.

Enclosed is a copy of suggested terms of reference. The suggested terms of reference are not meant to be the exact terms that an enquiry would adopt but rather they are meant to reflect the spirit of such an enquiry.

We are writing to ask if your organisation would be willing to endorse the call for an enquiry and send a representative to a public meeting to be held on Sunday 26th May 1974 in the Church Hall (off Collings Street) next to Collins Street Independent Church, cnr. Collins and Russell Streets, Melbourne, at 2.30 p.m.

You are requested to table the suggested terms of reference to the next meeting of your organisation and seek its support for an enquiry.

We enclose a list of organisations and individuals to whom this letter is being sent. If you think there are others who would be interested, please let us know and we will send invitations.

Please find enclosed a document prepared by the Social Policy Officer of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, David Griffiths, which is entitled "Why we should have an enquiry into the Housing Commission of Victoria."

Your co-operation is sought in answering and returning the attached questionnaire.

Max Stephens,  
For the Steering Committee.

Enclosures:

- DOCUMENT I: Why we should have an Enquiry into the Housing Commission of Victoria. D. Griffiths.
- DOCUMENT II: Terms of reference for an Enquiry into the Housing Commission of Victoria.
- DOCUMENT III: List of Organisations and Individuals invited to support the call for an Enquiry.
- DOCUMENT IV: Questionnaire.

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WHY WE SHOULD HAVE AN ENQUIRY INTO THE HOUSING COMMISSIONOF VICTORIA.David Griffiths.SIGNIFICANCE

The Victorian Housing Commission is one of the largest public authorities. It provides an essential service that directly influences the living standards and quality of life of large numbers of low-income and socially disadvantaged people.

The policies of the Commission have a profound effect on the lives of people on the Commission's waiting lists, its tenants, its home purchasers and on the social structure and services in the areas of the Commission's operations.

CRITICISMS

In recent years the Housing Commission has been subject to considerable criticism from a large number of organisations.

Amongst others, the criticisms have concerned:

- \* the rights of tenants.
- \* the management of estates.
- \* the quality of Commission homes and flats, their standards and facilities.
- \* the selection, quality and function of Estate Managers.
- \* the need for social workers, nursing, health and recreational staff.
- \* the handling of tenant grievances by the Commission.
- \* the system of rent rebates.
- \* the criteria for establishing priorities in allocating houses and flats.
- \* the absence of and need for emergency housing.
- \* the need to provide loans or grants to assist owners with repairs and renovations.
- \* the criteria for deciding on the distribution of flats and houses between country and metropolitan areas.
- \* the design and construction of commission houses.
- \* the procedures for the purchase of land.
- \* the effects of commission activities on regional planning.
- \* the absence of any controlling policy governing urban renewal.
- \* the slum clearance activities of the Commission.
- \* the destruction of worthwhile buildings.
- \* the use of demolition and repair orders for improper purposes.
- \* the absence of any effective means of appeal under the slum reclamation and housing standards provisions of the Housing Act, and under the Urban Renewal Act.
- \* the inadequacy of compensation paid.
- \* the economics of the Concrete House Project, Holmesglen.
- \* the high cost and low quality of Housing Commission of houses and flats.
- \* the fact that the Housing Commission of Victoria is not obliged to conform to the Uniform Building Regulations.
- \* the lack of policy on accommodating migrant groups.
- \* the failure to accommodate some of the neediest and most vulnerable groups e.g., single men and newly-arrived migrants.

- \* the criteria for establishing the basis of a repair order.
- \* the way in which demolition and major repair orders are placed on housing.

There is an urgent need for an independent enquiry to determine the validity of these criticisms, to advise the Government on changes in policy and administration that may be necessary and, in particular, to recommend on the future of the Commission.

#### PRECEDENTS

There are many recent precedents initiated by the Australian and State Governments for committees of enquiry into socially sensitive areas of policy where continuing economic and social change make it necessary to ensure that programmes have clear objectives which are relevant to changing needs. The enquiry would provide the Housing Commission with an opportunity to explain and justify its policies.

Even if the Commission had not been subject to such criticism, it would be appropriate to have an independent review of a State instrumentality that has functioned for a long time without there being any opportunity for consumers and community organisations to contribute towards present and future policies.

Constant criticism of the Housing Commission has helped to create in the minds of Commission tenants, purchasers and the public the view that occupants of Commission homes and flats are people with special characteristics. The descriptions of flats as "prisons in the sky" and references which suggest there is extensive poverty and a low quality of life in Commission estates as well as lack of services, tend to stigmatise and depress the people who live in Commission dwellings.

The strong and often emotive descriptions that have been used to direct attention to handicaps suffered by Commission tenants were necessary to draw attention to social problems but they have also had a negative effect in stigmatising Commission flats, housing estates and their occupants.

The Commission of Enquiry could evaluate the criticisms and, more importantly, recommend measures to remove the causes of the criticisms.

The Enquiry could examine whether a single authority such as the Housing Commission should be responsible for public housing in Victoria and alternative approaches to the provision of public housing, the advantages and disadvantages of each approach and the most preferable. The Government, Housing Commission tenants, home purchasers and the community generally would benefit from the Enquiry which should result in clarified and improved relationships of all who are concerned with housing policy.

7th March, 1974.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AN ENQUIRY INTO THE HOUSING COMMISSION  
OF VICTORIA.

The Enquiry shall examine the aims, policy and practice of the Housing Commission in providing public housing, ascertain the future needs of the community for government assistance to obtain housing and make recommendations appropriate to the realisation of these needs.

The terms of reference should include:

1. Examining the purpose of government involvement in Victoria and defining an appropriate government housing policy for the future.
2. Recommending what authority or authorities should be responsible for the planning, financing, construction and administration of housing provided by government and an appropriate organisational structure for the same.
3. (a) Examining the existing legislation and regulations relating to the Housing Commission of Victoria.  
(b) Examining the structure and administrative procedures of the Housing Commission of Victoria.
4. Examining the policies of the Housing Commission in Victoria in relation to eligibility and the range of services provided by the Commission. Recommending appropriate changes in eligibility and in the services the Commission provides to its users and potential users.
5. Examining how government housing affects the surrounding local government area and the community at large and how government housing has related and should relate to other government activities.
6. Examining how the public and tenants have and could contribute to the planning and administration of government housing.
7. Examining the activities of the Housing Commission of Victoria in the implementation of:
  - (a) the Housing (Standard of Habitation) Regulations.
  - (b) the Urban Renewal Act.
  - (c) the slum clearance provisions of the Housing Act.
8. Examining the construction methods, the cost and quality of Housing Commission structures.

The Enquiry should be asked to issue an interim report at the end of six months. This report should address itself to the redressing where possible of tenant grievances.

It is essential that tenants of the Housing Commission and the public be given the opportunity to assist the enquiry and that they are able to see results of their involvement.

The Enquiry should:

- (a) Consist of three expert and independent commissioners appointed by the government and an advisory panel of six consisting of three representatives nominated by the Housing Commission Tenants Union and three representatives nominated by the Housing Commission Enquiry group.
- (b) Have complete access to all relevant files of the Housing Commission and other relevant government departments.
- (c) Invite the public to make written and/or verbal submissions at open hearings.
- (d) Make available at a reasonable cost transcripts of these hearings. Individuals and groups making submissions should be provided with a free transcript of all hearings.
- (e) Go out to housing commission estates and talk with tenants.
- (f) Provide funds to the Housing Commission Tenants Union and other similar bodies to enable them to prepare submissions for the enquiry.
- (g) Release on their completion research and working papers prepared by staff of the enquiry. The public should be invited to comment on these papers.
- (h) Circulate draft reports to individuals and organisations who made submissions inviting their comments before the report is finalized.
- (i) Have its own staff responsible to the enquiry who will carry out independent research pertinent to the enquiry.

5th March, 1974.

HOUSING COMMISSION ENQUIRY

DOCUMENT III: LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS INVITED TO  
SUPPORT THE CALL FOR AN ENQUIRY

<u>ORGANISATION</u>	<u>REPRESENTATIVE</u>
A.A.S.W. (Vic. Branch)	Edith McCallum, 13 Glen Tower Drive, Glen Waverley, Vic., 3150
"	Jenny Slade, 13 Glen Tower Drive, Glen Waverley, Vic., 3150
Amalgamated Metalworkers Union.	John Halfpenny, Secretary, 1st Floor, 630 Swanston Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Australia Party.	Lindsay Walker, 12/210 Domain Road, South Yarra. Vic., 3141
Australian Association of Welfare Workers.	John Flynn, Society for Adult Deaf, 101 Wellington Parade South, Jolimont.
Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Engineers, (Vic. Division).	Secretary, Loco Hall, 562 Victoria Street, North Melbourne, Vic.,
Australian Greek Welfare Society.	Mr. G. Papadopoulos, Chairman, 168-170 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 3000
"	Conn. Constantinou, 168-170 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 3000
Australian Institute of Welfare Officers.	Ruth Copp, 7A Ferrars Place, South Melbourne, Vic.,
Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.	Dr. John Grigor, Secretary, 107 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Australian Pre-School Association (Vic. Branch)	Helen M. Paul, "Ware", Ware Cres., Ringwood East, Vic.,
"	Mrs. A. J. Farrance, Hon. Secretary, "Ware", Ware Cres., Ringwood East.
Australian Union of Students.	Neil McLean, 95 Drummond Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Barwon Regional Council for Social Development.	Mrs. Betty Kelly, P.O. Box 392, Geelong, Vic., 3220
Broadmeadows Progress Association.	Kevin Jowett, 24 Almurta Avenue, Coolaroo, Vic., 3048
Bricklayers Society Victorian Operative.	Secretary, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Brotherhood of St Laurence.	David Scott, Executive Director, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065

Brotherhood of St Laurence.	Peter Hollingworth, Associate Director, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 3065
"	David Griffiths, Social Policy Officer, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 3065
Builders' Labourers' Federation,	Secretary, 11 Lygon Street, Carlton.
Building Workers Industrial Union of Australia (Vic. Branch)	Secretary, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton.
Cairnmillar Institute.	Wendy Atkinson, 1/108A Millswyn Street, South Yarra, Vic., 3141
"	Elaine Brennan, 15 Cromwell Road, South Yarra, Vic., 3141
"	Dr. F. McNab, 100 Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic., 3000
Carlton Association.	David Beauchamp, 1019 Drummond Street, North Carlton, Vic., 3054
"	Miles Lewis, 242 Drummond Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Childrens Protection Society.	Ken Haddock, 14 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065
Childrens Welfare Association.	Herb. Suttie, 25 Queens Road, Melbourne, Vic., 3000
Citizens Action Federation.	Ian Elliot, Secretary, 2 Bruce Street, Mitcham, Vic., 3132.
Collingwood Residents Assoc.	R. F. I. Smith, 203 Gold Street, Clifton Hill Vic., 3068
"	R. D. Hogg, 223 Gold Street, Clifton Hill, Vic., 3068
"	M. A. Myers, 28 Berry Street, Clifton Hill, Vic, 3068
"	L. J. Layler, 28 Berry Street, Clifton Hill, Vic., 3068
Collins Street Independent Church.	Jenny Webster, C/O Post Office, Yuroke, Vic., 3047
"	G. E. Moore, 31 Pascoe Avenue, Strathmore, Vic., 3041
"	Inge Fernando, 34 Riverside Avenue, North Balwyn, Vic.,
Combined Pensioners Assoc.	D. L. Brownley, 58 Andrews Avenue, Reservoir, Vic., 3073
"	E. Brownley, 58 Andrews Avenue, Reservoir, Vic., 3073
"	Mrs. J. Fleming, Box 2617 W, G.P.O. Melbourne, Vic., 3001
Committee for Urban Action.	Geoff Baker, 24/43 Haines Street, North Melbourne, Vic., 3051



Committee for Urban Action.	Alan McVean, Coverlid and Davies, Pty, Ltd., 166 Swan Street, Richmond, Vic., 3121
Community Child Care.	Patricia Sebastian, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065
"	Winsome McCaughey, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065
Community Resource Centre.	Monica Banikoff, P.O. Box 62, Sunshine, Vic., 3020
"	Bernard H. Leeman, P.O. Box 62, Sunshine, Vic., 3020
Cyprian Community of Vic.	Tony Tounbourou, 217 Russell Street, Melbourne, Vic., 3000
Dorcas Street Residents Association.	Ludwig Stamer, Pickles Street, South Melbourne, Vic., 3205
Ecumenical Migration Centre.	David Cox, 133 Church Street, Richmond, Vic., 3121
"	Alan Matheson, 133 Church Street, Richmond, Vic., 3121
Electrical Trades Union.	Secretary, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Victoria. 3053
Emerald Hill,	Ray Wilson, P.O. Box 69, Albert Park, Vic., 3206
Federated Engine Driver's and Firemen's Association.	Secretary, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Victoria., 3053
Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre.	Arthur Faullmer, 110 Kerr Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065
"	John Adams, 6 Bell Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065
Fitzroy Residents Assoc.	Mr. Paul Bridgeford, 124 Napier Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065.
"	Aurora Calogezo, 656 Station Street, North Carlton, Vic.,
Furniture Trades' Society.	Secretary, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
Gas Employees' Union.	Secretary, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053

Good Neighbour Council.	D. O. Emery, 42 Albert Street, Footscray, Vic., 3011
Hawthorn Association.	Mr. G. M. Wilson, Chairman, 2 Narvena Court, Hawthorn, Vic., 3122
Heidelberg Community Service Bureau,	Fay Yule, 113 Ivanhoe Parade, Ivanhoe, Vic.,
Housing Commission Tenants Union.	Patrick Tomelty, 195/130 Racecourse Road, Flemington, Vic., 3031
"	Ken Mooney, 5/16 Derby Street, Kensington, Vic.,
Kensington Social Action Group.	Max Stephens, 14 McCracken Street, Kensington, Vic., 3031
Law Institute of Victoria.	Maurice Brophy, 281 Sydney Road, Coburg, Vic.,
Migrant Social Workers.	Elaine Brennan, 15 Cromwell Road, South Yarra, Vic., 3141
Miscellaneous Workers Union.	Mr. Harry Mitchell, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, Vic., 3053
National Trust of Australia, (Victoria).	Secretary, Como Avenue, South Yarra.
North Melbourne Association.	Ruth Crow, 39 O'Shanassy Street, North Melbourne, Vic., 3051
North Melbourne Social Service.	Secretary, 17 Brougham Street, North Melbourne, Vic., 3051
Parkville Association.	Eric Benjamin, Box 23, Parkville, Vic., 3052

Real Estate & Stock  
Institute of Victoria.

Secretary, Cnr. Wellington Parade  
and Powlett Street, East Melbourne.

Richmond Association.

Mrs. A. Eyres, 67 Erin Street,  
Richmond, Vic., 3121

Royal Australian Institute  
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Secretary, 30 Howe Cr., South  
Melbourne, Vic.,

"

Miles Lewis, School of Architecture,  
Melbourne University, Parkville,  
Vic., 3052

"

Peter Sanders, C/O 30 Howe Cres.,  
South Melbourne, Vic.,

Springvale Citizens Advice  
Bureau,

Mrs. Nerle Mitchell, 50 Osborne  
Avenue, Springvale, Vic., 3171

"

Jenny Slade, C/O 50 Osborne Avenue,  
Springvale, Vic., 3171

St. Kilda Community Centre.

Marion Scoun, Cnr. Carlisle and  
Chapel Streets, St. Kilda.

Town and Country Planning  
Association.

Margot Nicholls, 3 Baxter Street,  
Toorak, Vic., 3143

"

David Odgers, 36 Malvern Grove,  
North Caulfield, Vic., 3161

"

Mr. R. A. Gardner, President,  
Box 175, O.O. Nunawading, Vic.,  
3131

Victorian Association of  
Youth Clubs.

Secretary, Gisborne Street, East  
Melbourne, Vic., 3002

Victorian Council of Social  
Service.

Mr. C. Benjamin, 290 Wellington  
Street, Collingwood, Vic., 3066

"

Sonia Freidin, C/O 290 Wellington  
Street, Collingwood, Vic., 3066

Victorian Municipal Welfare  
Officers Association.

Helen McLeish, C/O City of Knox,  
Ferntree Gully, Vic., 3156

Womens Electoral Lobby.

Alma Morton, 29 Bokhara Road,  
South Caulfield, Vic., 3162

Y.C.W.

Kevin Smith, 355 Lonsdale Street,  
Melbourne, Vic., 3000

INDIVIDUALS

Jenny Bolwell	7 Wilson Street, Princes Hill, Vic.,
Freda Bunce	8/36 Boundary Road, North Melbourne, Vic.,
Andrew Burbidge	Commonwealth Commission of Enquiry into Poverty, P.O. Box 108, Carlton South, Vic., 3053
Tony Dalton	7 Wilson Street, Princes Hill, Vic.,
Tim Blitham,	Commonwealth Bureau of Roads, 60 Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic., 3000
Alan Jordan.	74 Falconer Street, Fitzroy North, Vic., 3068
Joan Radford	25 Hillcrest Avenue, Kew, Vic., 3101
Albert Van Moorst	41 Dickson Street, Sunshine, Vic.,
Alan Storer	422 Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic., 3000

HOUSING COMMISSION ENQUIRY

DOCUMENT IV: QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would your Organisation be prepared to support the call for an  
Enquiry? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you allow your name to be used as publicly supporting the  
need for an Enquiry? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be prepared to send a representative to a public meeting  
to call for an Enquiry? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be prepared to issue a press statement supporting the  
need for an Enquiry? \_\_\_\_\_

What information concerning the need for an Enquiry could you  
provide the Steering Committee for the public meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

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Would your Organisation be prepared to appear before an Enquiry?

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What would be the nature of your evidence to an Enquiry? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Name of contact person -

Position -

Telephone - Work :

After Hours :

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Position : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete and return to :

David Griffiths,  
Housing Commission Enquiry,  
67 Brunswick Street,  
FITZROY, VIC., 3065